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House of Representatives

TIME OF EMERGENCY FOR SOUTHERN BORDER!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: My amendment, Mr. Chairman, refers to the southern border of the United States.

We know the tragedies that had afflicted this country of September 11, especially on New York City; and arguments have been made on this floor very eloquently this afternoon about the need for help for New York City. The ripple effect of those attacks affected our whole Nation. And similar arguments can be made for other sectors of our country, other sectors of our economy. For example, the increased security that was called for after September 11 on our borders required what we call a level-one alert.

Level-one alert means that every individual, every vehicle is going to be stopped, inspected, trunk opened up, questions asked, information entered into a computer, questions asked again. That process of level-one alert takes time.

And what has occurred at the southern border is because of the time that is required for this increased security, which everybody supports and everybody wants, is that the waiting period for legal people to cross the border from Mexico into the United States has increased to an hour, 2 hours, 4 hours, sometimes 8 hours at a time. That waiting time for people to cross the border legally has devastated the economies of communities along the border.

I represent San Diego, California, which has the busiest border crossing between any two countries in the world. But what I say today refers also to Calexico, California; to Nogales, Arizona; to El Paso, Texas; to Brownsville, Texas. The border economies have depended on that legal crosser for their business. Anywhere from 50 to 90 percent of economic activity has been cut since September 11.

Now, nobody on the border wants terrorists to cross. Everybody supports the level-one security concerns. But what is needed if we are going to spend the time on level-one alert is to provide the resources to the Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to carry out these inspections.

We have 24 crossing gates at the San Ysidro border crossing in San Diego. Sometimes a couple of them are open, sometimes six or 12. Why not open them all? Why not open them all 24 hours a day? We could have both the level-one security and the quick time that is required to keep the flow moving.

People who want to shop in San Diego or in Calexico or Nogales or in Brownsville or in El Paso do not cross the border because it takes too long. People cannot cross the border for their jobs. People cannot cross the border to go to school. Let us open all the lanes 24 hours a day.

According to my discussions with the INS, the increased number of positions to do the level-one security and to keep the flow at a reasonable rate would cost about \$20 million, \$20 million. That seems like in the context of the discussions we have had today almost minuscule. We have talked about billions here and billions there. All I am saying is let us allocate within the budget, Mr. Chairman, allocate within that budget \$20 million to inspectors to help us deal with the border crossings.

We can have security. We can have the commercial flow that is absolutely necessary. Businesses along the border, these are mom and pop businesses. These are people who are having trouble keeping the mortgage going on their rents, who are having trouble keeping employees hired, having trouble meeting the utility payments. It is devastating the border communities, in fact, devastating much of the city of San Diego. Three billion dollars a year of our economy in San Diego comes from the legal shopper from Mexico. So let us keep terrorists out. Let us keep security high, but let us keep the flow necessary for commercial activity. Let us reallocate within the budget, Mr. Chairman, \$20 million to make sure that the southern border is properly staffed. The bill has \$165 million for the northern border. Let us put in 20 extra for the southern border. I do not think that is too much to ask.